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SUBJECT: LUNG DISEASE CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GLOBAL EFFORTS

1. Summary: From October 18-22 in Paris, the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) held its 36th World Conference on Lung Health, the world's premier meeting of tuberculosis and public health experts from the perspective of low-income, high disease-burdened countries. Some two thousand participants from 129 countries shared experiences and addressed the conference theme "scaling up and sustaining effective tuberculosis, HIV and asthma prevention and control." A number of sessions underscored that, perhaps for the first time, significant resources - largely from the Global Fund against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria - existed to tackle tuberculosis at the global level. At the conference, the Union, together with other partners, including the World Health Organization, launched a new asthma drug facility. End Summary.

Global Fund Major Contributor against HIV and TB  
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2. Traditionally a tuberculosis-focused conference, this year the Scientific Program highlighted the strong links between tuberculosis and HIV. Dr. Michel Kazatchkine, France's 'AIDS Ambassador,' noted in the first plenary that tuberculosis now causes one-third of HIV-related deaths. He stated that resources for addressing HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis have greatly increased and that the Global Fund plays a particularly important role. Despite progress, however, he noted that five million new HIV infections occur each year, with significant incidences in young adults and women. He spoke highly of the work of the Global Fund in addressing both these diseases. He noted that HIV proposals to the Global Fund are now required to have an anti-tuberculosis component and tuberculosis proposals must have an anti-HIV component.

3. The Global Fund's Deputy Executive Director Evans and Dr. Kazatchkine both responded to several questions addressing Global Fund issues. One questioner wanted to know why, given that free or heavily subsidized antiretroviral (ARV) treatments are highly effective in enhancing survivability in the HIV disease-ridden, ARV drugs are not more universally provided free-of-charge. Evans and Kazatchkine explained that while Global Fund resources are made available at no cost to governments, country programs often require charges for ARV's and other care. A project coordinator for the Philippines program added that charges were necessary for ARV's to generate a sustainability fund for the future because Global Fund resources "would not be available forever."

Attention to HIV  
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4. Two of the three plenary sessions were devoted to HIV itself. (One addressed the responsibility of the scientific community to make HIV tests and drugs available to developing communities, while the other noted the need to increase access to HIV and asthma drugs.) Dr. Helene Gayle, from the Gates Foundation, spoke of the tasks, duties and responsibilities of the scientific community to ensure the accessibility of new tools, including diagnostic tests and drugs, to poor and disadvantaged communities, to enable the rapid scale up and sustaining of TB and HIV control activities. Dr. Ian Smith from the World Health Organization, in a second plenary, outlined the need and prerequisites for developing initiatives to increase access to HIV and asthma drugs.

5. To expand knowledge on clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS, two post-graduate courses were held: one based on case discussions, and the other on integrated care of HIV-infected patients, highlighting the natural history of HIV, its opportunistic infections and the use of antiretroviral medications. In addition, HIV-related sessions were held on laboratory tests, treatment and care, mycobacterial immunity, children, countries with emerging TB-HIV co-epidemics, policy advocacy, human resource development, programmatic issues, and activism.

## Giving Activists their Say

16. In an effort to expand from its programmatic, scientific and technologic base, the Union also embraced the key role of community activists, who have contributed greatly in not only the battle against HIV/AIDS, but also against tuberculosis. Mr. Zackie Achmat, an HIV/AIDS activist from South Africa, presented the guest lecture "How can social mobilization contribute to enhancing and sustaining TB and HIV/AIDS control in low-income settings?"

## Addressing Needs of Asthma Victims

17. Worldwide, approximately 300 million people suffer from asthma. Although this disease has been identified as a significant public health problem in developing countries, where the majority of asthmatics reside, most cases go undiagnosed, untreated or are mistreated. Poor access to medications, in terms of both affordability and availability, is the main barrier. At the conference, The Union, working with partners such as the World Health Organization, launched a new mechanism - the Asthma Drug Facility - to provide access to affordable good quality essential asthma drugs, which will use pooled requests to obtain the lowest possible prices, as well as providing technical assistance and monitoring of their storage, distribution and use.

## Note your calendar!

18. Next year's conference will be held in Paris, October 30 through November 4, 2006.

19. Comment: Aside from providing practitioners from around the world with knowledge and technical training in addressing lung diseases (and HIV), the plenary sessions of the conference underscored the important - and grave - nexus between HIV and tuberculosis, and the need to develop treatment programs to address both diseases simultaneously. In this regard, conference speakers noted the greater availability of donor resources in recent years targeted at developing world health concerns. The work of the Global Fund in particular plays an acknowledged, important role internationally in addressing not only HIV, but also lung disease. End Comment.

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